July 18, 2006

MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor Bellamy and Members of the Asheville City Council

VIA: Gary W. Jackson, City Manager
Jeffrey B. Richardson, Assistant City Manager

FROM: Gregory H. Grayson, Fire and Rescue Chief

SUBJECT: Response to "*Asheville: At the Nuclear Crossroads*"

The City of Asheville contracts with the State of North Carolina to provide hazardous materials emergency response services to the 20 westernmost counties within our state. When responding outside of the city limits of Asheville, Asheville firefighters are acting as agents of the state.

In June, 2006, a report entitled *Asheville: At the Nuclear Crossroads* was disseminated by the Common Sense at the Nuclear Crossroads Campaign. The report discusses, among other things, Asheville Fire and Rescue Department's role in incidents involving radioactive materials. While the report did contain accurate information, it failed to divulge the capabilities of Asheville's Hazardous Materials Team. The following summary will outline the personnel, equipment and training involved with responding to radiological incidents.

Asheville Fire and Rescue is host to North Carolina Hazardous Materials Regional Response Team 6 (RRT 6). RRT 6 is one of 7 emergency response teams strategically located around the state. The teams were developed in 1994 as a result of legislation passed by the North Carolina General Assembly.

The RRT program involves a contractual agreement between the City of Asheville and the North Carolina Division of Emergency Management. The State of North Carolina provides over $2 million in equipment and apparatus to each response team. In return, fire department personnel from each contracting city is responsible for deploying necessary personnel and equipment in responding to incidents within their respective regions. Asheville's region includes the 20 westernmost counties of North Carolina. The team also responds to hazardous materials incidents in Asheville and Buncombe County.

The RRTs are available to supplement local resources when an incident is beyond a local jurisdiction's capabilities. Such incidents generally require more sophisticated equipment and personnel who have received a high level of training.

Asheville/RRT 6 team members are qualified to handle a wide range of hazardous materials incidents. The team is staffed by approximately 100 Asheville Fire and Rescue personnel trained to the Hazardous Materials Technician level. At a minimum, each Technician must have more than 200 hours of intensive, specialized hazardous materials training.

In the context of nuclear and radiological incidents, Asheville/RRT 6 has a wide range of resources at its disposal. The equipment utilized by the team includes;

- Ludlum Geiger Counter - Detects alpha, beta and gamma radiation
- Gamma Scout Survey Meter – Detects alpha, beta and gamma radiation
- Radiac Survey Meter– Detects beta and gamma radiation
- Radiation Pagers – Detects beta and gamma radiation
- Dosimeters – Detects beta radiation
- Decontamination Equipment

Asheville/RRT 6 personnel have received extensive training in nuclear and radiological emergencies. Three of the team's personnel recently participated in an intense 32 hour training course at the Nevada Test Site. Their hands-on training involved the use of meters in detecting radiation in a real world environment. The Nevada Test Site was home to our nations' nuclear weapons tests. The site provides a unique opportunity to safely train in an area contaminated with nuclear radiation.

Asheville/RRT 6 personnel also receive continuing education and training. The North Carolina Division of Air Quality provides the team with realistic radiological response preparation. Annual instruction in radiation detection is a component of the team's annual strategic training program.

Since the inception of the RRT program, a serious, large scale incident involving radioactive materials has not occurred in Western North Carolina. However, in 2004, a tanker carrying low level uranyl nitrate did lose a relatively small amount of the product. The incident occurred at a NCDOT weigh station in Henderson County. Asheville/RRT 6 personnel provided technical assistance to the local responders. The assistance to local responders was further expanded by collaborating with the North Carolina Division of Air Quality. The incident was terminated with no adverse human or environmental effects.

RRT 6 is trained and equipped to manage the initial response to an incident involving a radioactive material. Basic principles apply to radiological incidents. These principles are time, distance and shielding. Procedures the team will follow for managing a radiological incident include;

- Detect the presence of radiation
- Decontaminate exposed victims
- Establish exclusion zones
- Monitor area for radiation
- Assist state and federal agencies in further actions

Some members of the Common Sense at the Nuclear Crossroads Campaign have recently asked us to comment and/or take a position on the nuclear transportation issue. Because the questions apply to state authorized RRT responses, our contract with the State of North Carolina requires that we re-direct these type inquiries to the North Carolina Department of Crime Control and Public Safety. We can provide feedback from a local perspective, but need to defer to NCCCPS for regional or state issues. We are simply not empowered to speak on behalf of the RRT program.

Should you have any questions concerning Asheville /RRT 6 responsibilities and capabilities please don't hesitate to contact me at 828-259-5637 or Interim Assistant Chief Gary Cornett at 259-5649. Thank you for your continuing support and cooperation.